The Political Phenomena Listening To History In Islamic Civilization.

By. Ahmad Wansa Al-faiz.

Surat Al-Baqarah Ayat 285 :

ءَامَنَ ٱلرَّسُولُ بِمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِن رَّبِّهِۦ وَٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ ۚ كُلٌّ ءَامَنَ بِٱللَّهِ وَمَلَٰٓئِكَتِهِۦ وَكُتُبِهِۦ وَرُسُلِهِۦ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّن رُّسُلِهِۦ ۚ وَقَالُوا۟ سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا ۖ غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ ٱلْمَصِيرُ

Arab-Latin: āmanar-rasụlu bimā unzila ilaihi mir rabbihī wal-mu`minụn, kullun āmana billāhi wa malā`ikatihī wa kutubihī wa rusulih, lā nufarriqu baina aḥadim mir rusulih, wa qālụ sami'nā wa aṭa'nā gufrānaka rabbanā wa ilaikal-maṣīr

artinya: Rasul telah beriman kepada Al Quran yang diturunkan kepadanya dari Tuhannya, demikian pula orang-orang yang beriman. Semuanya beriman kepada Allah, malaikat-malaikat-Nya, kitab-kitab-Nya dan rasul-rasul-Nya. (Mereka mengatakan): "Kami tidak membeda-bedakan antara seseorangpun (dengan yang lain) dari rasul-rasul-Nya", dan mereka mengatakan: "Kami dengar dan kami taat". (Mereka berdoa): "Ampunilah kami ya Tuhan kami dan kepada Engkaulah tempat kembali".

"Sami'na Wa Atho'na Ghufranaka Wa Ilaikal Masir"

(We hear and we obey. [We seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the [final] destination)

Introduction.

The study of political phenomena in Islamic civilization reveals a profound epistemological paradox: while Islam provides a comprehensive framework for understanding historical patterns and governance, Islamic societies have repeatedly fallen into cycles of political degeneration that mirror the very failures their sacred texts warned against. This essay examines how the concept of "listening to history" (*al-istima' li al-tarikh*) represents a unique Islamic methodology for political analysis, one that transcends mere empirical study to encompass spiritual and hermeneutical dimensions of historical understanding.

The opening invocation "Sami'na wa Atho'na" encapsulates the essential posture required for authentic political learning: the integration of hearing (*sama'*) with obedience (*tha'ah*), suggesting that true historical comprehension demands not merely intellectual analysis but existential commitment to the wisdom embedded within historical experience.

The Hermeneutics of Khalifah: From Arbitration to Domination.

The Arabic term *khalifah* presents a fascinating case study in the transformation of political concepts. Etymologically derived from the root *kh-l-f*, meaning "to differ" or "to succeed," the concept originally denoted a mechanism for managing plurality rather than establishing dominance. The Quranic declaration "Inni ja'ilun fil ardhi khalifah" (Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successor) should be understood within the context of cosmic succession, where each civilization serves as *khalifah* for its predecessor in managing the divine trust of earthly stewardship.

The angels' concerned response, "Ataj'alu fiha man yufsidu fiha wa yasfiku ad-dima'" (Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood?), reveals an understanding of the inherent tension within plurality management. Their "innocence" (*barahah*) allowed them to perceive that difference often leads to conflict, yet the divine response suggests that this tension is not a design flaw but a testing ground for civilizational maturity.

However, the historical trajectory of the *khalifah* concept demonstrates what we might call "semantic drift" - the gradual transformation of a functional concept into an institutional structure. What began as arbitration of differences (*tahkim al-ikhtilafat*) evolved into monarchical systems that consolidated power rather than distributing it. This transformation reflects a broader pattern in Islamic political history: the materialization of spiritual abstractions into concrete power structures.

The Neurological Foundations of Historical Listening.

Recent advances in neuroscience provide remarkable insights into the Islamic emphasis on *sama'* (listening) as an epistemological method. The hippocampus, the brain's primary memory consolidation center, is anatomically positioned near the temporal lobe, in close proximity to auditory processing centers. This neurobiological architecture suggests that "hearing" and "remembering" are fundamentally interconnected processes, lending scientific credence to the Quranic methodology of learning through auditory engagement with historical narratives.

The concept of *rikz* (whisper/trace) mentioned in Surat Maryam - "hal tuḥissu min-hum min aḥadin au tasma'u lahum rikzā" (Do you perceive of them anyone or hear from them a sound?) - takes on new significance when understood through this neurological lens. Civilizations that fail to properly consolidate their experiences into transferable wisdom leave no *rikz* for subsequent generations to learn from, while those that successfully transform their experiences into universal principles create lasting echoes that can guide future societies.

The Mudghah Principle: Individual Transformation and Collective Reform.

The prophetic hadith regarding the *mudghah* (morsel of flesh) in the human body provides crucial insight into the mechanics of civilizational change. "Ala wa inna fil jasadi mudghatan idha salahat salaha al-jasadu kulluhu, wa idha fasadat fasada al-jasadu kulluhu. Ala wa hiya al-qalb" (Beware! There is a piece of flesh in the body if it becomes good (reformed) the whole body becomes good but if it gets spoilt the whole body gets spoilt and that is the heart).

This principle suggests that political reform cannot be achieved through structural changes alone but requires transformation at the level of individual consciousness (*qalb*). The heart's capacity for change (*taqallub*) explains why even the most well-intentioned reform movements often degenerate into the very systems they sought to replace. Without sustained attention to the spiritual dimension of governance, political structures inevitably reflect the spiritual condition of their architects and administrators.

The historical pattern of Islamic political movements - from initial spiritual fervor through institutionalization to eventual corruption - can be understood as manifestations of collective *qalb* transformation. The rapid transition from the Prophet's community-based governance to the Umayyad dynastic system exemplifies how quickly

spiritual movements can be co-opted by pre-existing power paradigms when the foundational work of heart transformation is incomplete.

The Grammar of Universal Values in Particular Contexts.

The Quranic principle "fa innamā yassarnāhu bilisānika" (Indeed, We have made it easy in your tongue) reveals Islam's sophisticated approach to cultural translation. Rather than imposing uniform practices across diverse contexts, Islamic values provide what might be called a "grammar for history" - a set of analytical tools for understanding recurring patterns in human civilization while allowing for contextual adaptation.

This grammatical approach explains the apparent contradiction between Islam's universal claims and its tolerance for cultural diversity, as exemplified in Quranic verse: "wa lā tasubbū alladhīna yad'ūna min dūni Allāhi... kadhālika zayyannā li kulli ummatin 'amalahum" (And do not insult those they invoke other than Allah... Thus We have made pleasing to every nation their deeds). The recognition that Allah has "adorned" each nation's practices suggests that plurality itself is divinely ordained, requiring sophisticated management rather than elimination.

The challenge for Islamic political thought lies in maintaining this balance between universal principles and contextual sensitivity. Historical failures often stem from either extreme: rigid uniformity that ignores local conditions, or complete relativism that abandons universal ethical standards. The art of Islamic governance lies in what we might call "principled adaptation" - the application of universal values through locally appropriate mechanisms.

Contemporary Implications and Conclusions.

The framework of "listening to history" offers valuable insights for contemporary Islamic political movements. Rather than seeking to recreate historical institutional forms, this approach suggests focusing on the underlying principles that those institutions were meant to serve. The frequent failure of modern "Islamic state" projects can often be traced to their emphasis on formal structures (constitution, legal codes, institutional hierarchies) while neglecting the spiritual and social prerequisites that make such structures viable.

The concept of *khilafah* as generational responsibility rather than individual office provides a more sustainable model for Islamic political engagement. Each generation becomes *khalifah* for its predecessors in the ongoing work of justice implementation, requiring not the recreation of past forms but the creative application of eternal principles to contemporary challenges.

The neurobiological understanding of memory consolidation suggests that Islamic political education should emphasize narrative and experiential learning over purely theoretical approaches. The traditional Islamic emphasis on *qasas* (stories) and *siyar* (biographical narratives) reflects an intuitive understanding of how wisdom is most effectively transmitted across generations.

Ultimately, the political phenomena of Islamic civilization demonstrate both the potential and the fragility of value-based governance. The recurring cycles of reform and degeneration suggest that sustainable political change requires continuous attention to the spiritual foundations of power, ongoing dialogue between universal principles and local contexts, and most importantly, the cultivation of leaders whose *qalb* (hearts) are aligned with the principles they seek to implement.

The call "Sami'na wa Atho'na" thus represents not merely historical submission but active engagement with the ongoing work of civilizational development - hearing the wisdom embedded in past experiences and committing to its faithful implementation in ever-new contexts. Only through such "listening" can Islamic political thought fulfill its potential as a source of guidance for human governance.

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